

BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

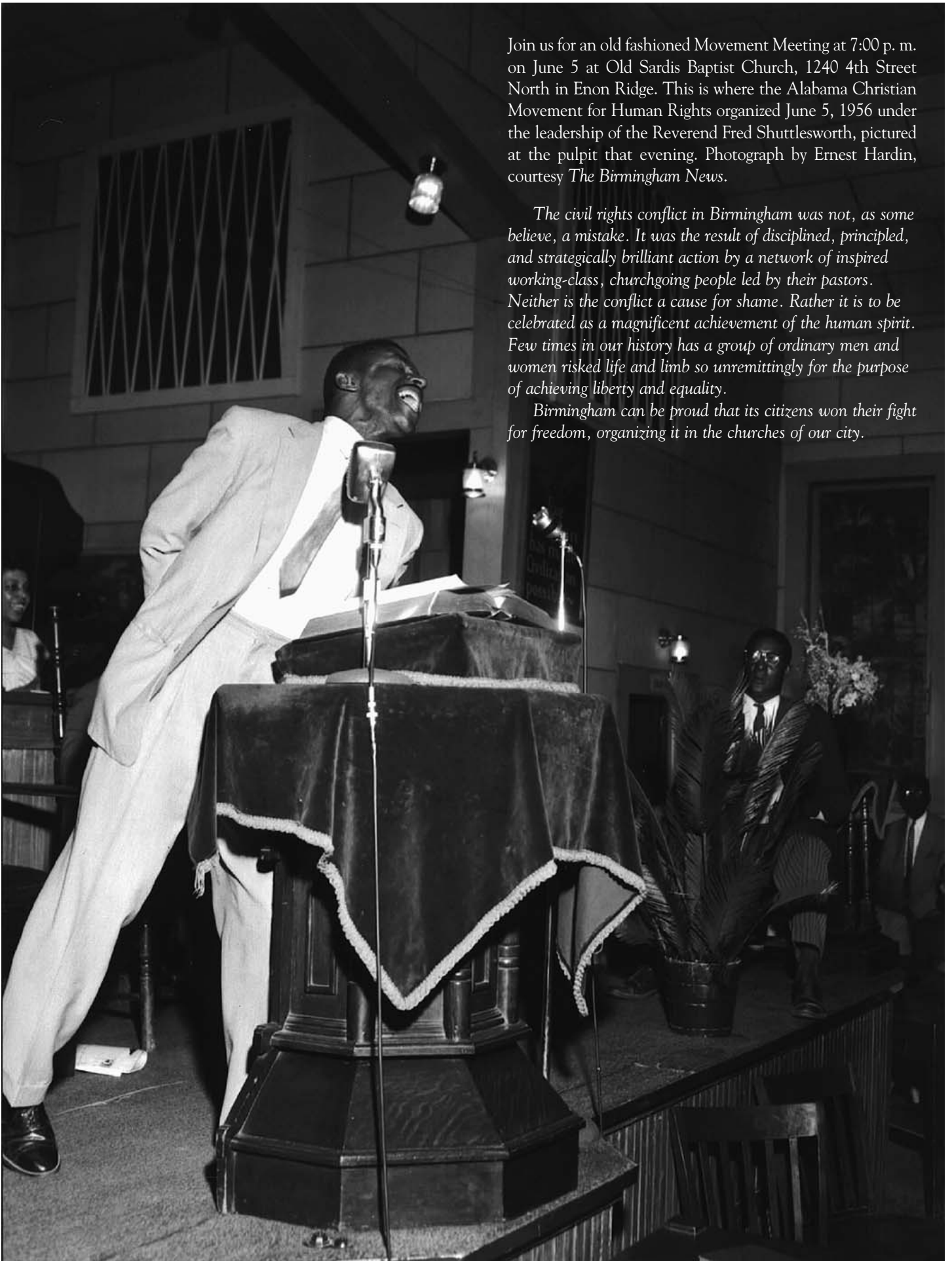
June 2006

Celebrate the 50th of the Movement

Join us for an old fashioned Movement Meeting at 7:00 p. m. on June 5 at Old Sardis Baptist Church, 1240 4th Street North in Enon Ridge. This is where the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights organized June 5, 1956 under the leadership of the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, pictured at the pulpit that evening. Photograph by Ernest Hardin, courtesy *The Birmingham News*.

The civil rights conflict in Birmingham was not, as some believe, a mistake. It was the result of disciplined, principled, and strategically brilliant action by a network of inspired working-class, churchgoing people led by their pastors. Neither is the conflict a cause for shame. Rather it is to be celebrated as a magnificent achievement of the human spirit. Few times in our history has a group of ordinary men and women risked life and limb so unremittingly for the purpose of achieving liberty and equality.

Birmingham can be proud that its citizens won their fight for freedom, organizing it in the churches of our city.



THE ORIGINAL DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Mass Meeting Of Civic Interest

Tuesday Night, June 5, 1956

Called by the Following Ministers: F. L. Shuttlesworth, N. H. Smith, Jr., T. L. Lane, R. L. Alford and G. E. Pruitt.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE ON RESOLUTIONS:

The Committee of 11 Ministers and Laymen met June 4th, 2:15 P.M. in the Smith and Gaston Funeral Chapel, 1600 5th Ave., N., to discuss plans, Principles, and Resolutions to be presented to the Mass Meeting. Rev. F. L. Shuttlesworth presided.

The discussion centered on the need of an organization to work in our Civic interest, and the State-Wide implications of such an Organization was mentioned by Rev. Alford. Also discussed, was the name by which such an Organization should be known. Next came the reading and discussion, and the adoption of a Declaration of Principles and Resolutions to be recommended to the Mass Meeting.

Discussion centered next on various committees, and the purported functioning of such Committees. Suggested was a Steering Committee (to be appointed in the Mass Meeting) to appoint other Committees for the organization. Each person pledged his and her all to the **Cause of Human Rights**, and spoke of the need now for our ambitions to be realized to the point of activity. The Committee made the following recommendations:

1. That this Mass Meeting form an Organization under the Name of "The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights."

2. That the following be adopted as a Declaration of Principles by the Organization:

(A) As free and independent Citizens of the United States of America, and of the State of Alabama, we express publicly our determination to press forward persistently for Freedom and Democracy, and the removal from our society any forms of Second Class Citizenship.

(B) We are not echoing the will or sentiments of Outsiders; but our own convictions and Will to be free, so help us God. We will not become Rabblers; but will be sober, firm, peaceful, and resolute, within the Framework of Goodwill.

(C) We Believe in our Courts and in Justice administered by our Courts; but we now point out to the Nation's conscience a strange paradox: One State District Court Judge can rule and immediately it is obeyed over the entire State — even if questioned or disagreed with; But even a unanimous Decision by 9 Judges of the U. S. Supreme Court (set up by the constitution to be the Highest and Final Court), and Rulings by Federal District Judges, representing the whole United States of America are not only questioned and disagreed with, but Openly Flaunted, Disregarded, and Totally Ignored.

(D) We Believe in State's Rights; but we believe that any first RIGHTS are HUMAN RIGHTS. And the first right of a State is to Protect Human Rights, and to guarantee to each of its Citizens the same Rights and Privileges.

(E) We heartily concur in and endorse the Rulings of the Federal Judiciary that **All** public Facilities belong to and should be open to All on the same and equal terms; and we Hope, Trust, and Pray that efforts to commence should be begun by Officials in the Spirit of Brotherhood and Goodwill; without the necessity of Lawsuits having to be filed.

(F) We most highly commend the activities of the Officials and Citizens everywhere for the efforts made for Civil Rights, and we thank God for them. But especially do we applaud Negroes in Montgomery, Ala., and Tallahassee, Fla., conducting themselves in the struggle so valiantly, and without rancor, hate, and smear, and above all without violence.

(G) As to Gradualism, we hold that it means to move forward, slowly maybe but surely; not vacillation, procrastination, or evasion. The hastily enacted laws and enflamed statements of Public Officials do not lead us to embrace Gradualism. We want a beginning **NOW! We have already waited 100 years!!**

(H) We Negroes shall never become enemies of the White People: We are all Americans; But America was born in the struggle for Freedom from Tyranny and Oppression. We shall never bomb any homes or lynch any persons; but we must, because of History and the future, march to Complete Freedom — with unbowed heads, praying hearts, and an unyielding determination. And we seek Guidance from our Heavenly Father; and from all men, Goodwill and understanding.

3. That a Steering Committee be appointed in this Mass Meeting to appoint the following other Committees: Finance, Education, Recreation, Transportation, Police Protection, Civic Rights, Jobs, Voting and Registration, Housing and Youth.

4. That this Mass Meeting go on record as unanimously supporting and applauding the efforts of Birmingham Negroes to form a Federal Loan Association in Birmingham.

5. That this Mass Meeting upon adjournment, will do so to meet Monday, June 11th, 7:00 o'clock, at the New Pilgrim Baptist Church, 903 South 6th Ave., Birmingham, Alabama.

COMMITTEE: Revs. F. L. Shuttlesworth, N. H. Smith, Jr., R. L. Alford, C. L. Vincent, C. H. George, Atty. Oscar W. Adams, Mrs. Lucinda Robey, C. J. Evans, G. C. Gissentanner, Mr. Lewis Willie, and others.

About "The Movement" and the Movement Churches

The Birmingham Civil Right Movement of the 1950s and 1960s — "The Movement" as its members called it — began on June 5, 1956. The first Mass Meeting was held at Sardis Baptist Church, 1240 Fourth Street North in Enon Ridge.

The Movement began when the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth organized the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights to fight for equal rights and first class citizenship for his people. The State of Alabama had outlawed the National Association for Colored People (the NAACP), formed in 1909 to champion rights and voting privileges. ACMHR organized to fill the void.

Many people know that the Civil Right Act of 1964 — which ensures equal access to public accommodations in America — was a response to the demonstrations and violence that occurred in Birmingham in the spring and fall of 1963.

Less known is the fact that Birmingham became a catalyst for the most dramatic social and legal changes of the 20th century because of blue collar African Americans and their pastor-leaders who worked from 1956 through the 1960s in the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. ACMHR Mass Meetings to educate and motivate participants were held every Monday night in nearly 60 churches scattered across the industrial city at this time. The meeting were modeled upon the Baptist worship service, full of religious fervor, and well attended by 300 or 400 faithful members.

ACMHR "was not a ministerial association. It was people more than pastors. Pastors and members of individual churches welcomed the ministerial-led movement. People who attended the mass meetings put pressure on their pastors to host meetings To be a meet-

ing church was to invite terror from the police and the Klan," Reverend Shuttlesworth noted in a 1998 interview.

ACMHR became the *strongest* of the local civil rights movements that joined together to form an umbrella group, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) under the leadership of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. From SCLC's founding in January 1957, Reverend Shuttlesworth served as SCLC secretary and as one of the "Big Three": King, Shuttlesworth and Abernathy." Shuttlesworth was the only major SCLC leader to run a local organization. Called by his colleagues, "the Wild Man from Birmingham," Shuttlesworth was bombed beaten and jailed more than any other civil rights minister. He is said to have taken more cases to the U. S. Supreme Court than any other private individual in the history of the court as he and his organization challenged racist laws.

In the spring of 1963, at the invitation of Reverend Shuttlesworth, the ACMHR and the SCLC joined together for the marches and demonstrations in which 4,000 people went to jail for freedom.

"But for Birmingham, we wouldn't be here". So stated President John F. Kennedy during the summer of 1963. "Here" was a meeting at the White House to plan what became the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act, together with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, confirmed the change in the moral, social and political climate of America. The 1964 Act mandating equality in public accommodations and employment was inspired by the Birmingham demonstrations of April and May 1963.

Negroes roar approval at rights meeting

Reprinted from *The Birmingham News*, June 6, 1956, Pages 1 & 11

An organization pledged to sweeping away "any forms of second class citizenship" was formed here last night amid roars of an estimated 1,000 Negroes approving a "march to complete freedom."

The "Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights" was established at a mass meeting of Negroes at Sardis Baptist Church.

Negro ministers told the overflow crowd the new organization may provide leadership for Negroes over Alabama and possibly the entire South. Speakers declared it has no connection with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The meeting was announced after Circuit Judge Walter B. Jones granted an injunction at Montgomery Friday restraining the NAACP from operating in Alabama, but a spokesman said it had been set before that date.

The Rev. F. L. Shuttlesworth, one of the ministers who called the meeting, was named president by acclamation.

The Rev. R. L. Alford, pastor of the Sardis Baptist Church, 1240 Fourth St. N., estimated 1,000 to 1,100 Negroes attended the meeting. The church has a seating capacity of about 850, he said, and there were a number of persons standing.

Rev. Shuttlesworth, the principal speaker, declared: "The Citizens Councils won't like this. But then, I don't like a lot of things they do."

The young Negro preacher frequently raised his voice to a shout during his speech and mopped his face with a handkerchief. A thermometer near the pulpit read 88 degrees.

At the close of his address, Rev. Shuttlesworth introduced the Rev. N. H. Smith, Jr., who read a report of a committee which met Monday.

The committee report, containing a resolution naming the organization and setting forth its aims was adopted with a roar of approval.

One dissenting vote was cast, that of a man who identified himself as G. W. McMurray. He obtained the floor later and declared: "We should think sanely of what we are doing. Birmingham is too over-organized now." He cited another organization of Negro ministers formed several months ago.

Rev. Shuttlesworth replied, "If it takes one organization five months to get a constitution, what are we going to do!"

The speaker was interrupted a number of times by cheers and applause. The good-natured audience also encouraged him with frequent cries of "Yes, yes," "Go ahead, Reverend," and "That's right."

In his impassioned plea for organized Negro leadership, the speaker declared, "Our citizens are reactive under the dismal yoke of segregation." Then, he shouted, "Aren't you," and the crowd, roared "Yes."

"These are the days when men would like to kill hope, when men in Mississippi can be declared 'not guilty' (of murder), when men can be shot down on the steps of the courthouse. These are dark days.

"But hope is not dead. Hope is alive here tonight," he said.

He shouted, "We seek nothing which we would not deny others."

He asked, "Would you be willing tonight for a white man to sit down beside you?"

The audience again roared assent.

"Then you believe in integration," Rev. Shuttlesworth declared.

The lengthy resolution adopted near the close of the meeting was prepared by a committee of 11 ministers and laymen.

"As free and independent citizens of the United States of America and of the State of Alabama, we express publicly our determination to press persistently for freedom and democracy and the removal from our society any forms of second class citizenship."



"HANDS UP IN VOTE TO SET UP NEGRO RIGHTS ORGANIZATION . . . Movement born with cheers of 1,000 Negroes in packed church here." The Birmingham News, June 6, 1956, page 11.



Left: "Rev. Shuttlesworth . . . Leads Negro group." Right: "Rev. G. W. McMurray . . . One dissenting." The Birmingham News, June 6, 1956, page 11.

Commemorating the Movement Churches

Each of the 60 Movement churches will be awarded a historical marker on the evening of June 5, 2006 to commemorate their role in the Birmingham Movement. Those congregations remaining in their Movement-era church buildings may display the marker at the front entrance to the church. Otherwise, the historical markers must be displayed inside the church. Those congregations or persons now located in the historic Movement-era churches many also display the historical markers on the outside of the historic buildings.

Churches to be Presented Historical Markers

Abyssinia Baptist Church, Bethel AME Church, Bethel Baptist Church, Canaan (Missionary) Baptist Church, Christian Valley Baptist Church, East End Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of East Thomas, First Baptist Church of Ensley, First Baptist Church of Hooper City, First Baptist Church of Kingston, First Baptist Church of Woodlawn, First Ebenezer Baptist Church, First Metropolitan Baptist Church, 46th Street Baptist Church, Galilee Baptist Church, Groveland Baptist Church, Hopewell Baptist Church, Jackson Street Baptist Church, Lily Grove Baptist Church, Macedonia 17th Street Baptist Church, Metropolitan AME Zion Church, Metropolitan CME Church, Metropolitan Community Church, Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, New

Bethlehem Baptist Church, New Hope Baptist Church, New Pilgrim Baptist Church, New Rising Star Baptist Church, New Salem Baptist Church, Oak Street Baptist Church, (Sixth Street) Peace Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Regular (St. Mathew) Missionary Baptist Church, St. James Baptist Church, St. John AME Church, St. John Baptist Church, St. Luke AME Church, St. Luke AME Zion Church, St. Paul AME Church, St. Paul CME Church, St. Paul (United) Methodist Church, St. Peter Primitive Baptist Church, (Historic) Sardis Baptist Church, 17th Street AOH (AOH Cathedral) Church, Shady Grove Baptist Church, 16th Street Baptist Church, Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, Historic (Sixth Avenue) Zion Hill Baptist Church, South Elyton Baptist Church, Starlight Baptist Church, Tabernacle Baptist Church, Thirgood (Memorial) CME Church, 32nd Street Baptist Church, 22nd Avenue Baptist Church, Union Bethel Independent Methodist Church, West End Hills Baptist Church, Zion Spring Baptist Church, Zion Star Baptist Church, First Congregational (Christian) Church

Additionally, the following persons and churches now occupying Movement era church facilities will receive markers for placement on the historic structures: Omie Crockett Sr., current owner of the First Baptist Church of Ensley Parsonage (occupied by the Reverend and Mrs. A. D. King and their family in May 1963 when it was bombed); Christy Holtz, currently renovating historic 32nd Street Baptist Church into residential housing units; Deliverance Temple Inter-Faith Church now headquartered in the historic Sixth Avenue Zion Hill Baptist Church; Christ Temple AFM Church of God located in the historic Metropolitan A. M. E. Zion Church, and Lighthouse Church Ministry located in the historic First Baptist Church of Kingston.

Documenting and Listing Movement Churches on the National Register of Historic Places

Since 1993, Birmingham Historical Society, working at times with the Historic American Engineering Record and the Historic American Building Survey of the National Park Service, has conducted field work and archival research on Birmingham's Civil Rights Churches. This research was published in *A Walk to Freedom—The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth & the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, 1956-1964*. Preparation of nominations for listing on the National Register of Historic Places continues.

During the 1990s, full National Park Service (NPS) documentation — histories, photographs and measured drawings sufficient to rebuild the churches — was completed for Bethel Baptist Church and Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

To be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, a Movement era church must remain at its Movement era site and retain sufficient architectural integrity. Additionally, as the churches are being nominated for their “civil rights associations” and their “period of significance – 1956-1963” is not beyond the required 50-year threshold, NPS reviewers require documentation to justify “exceptional national significance.”

To date individual nominations to the National Register have been completed for 15 ACMHR churches and these churches have been placed by the Secretary of the Interior on the National Register, the nation's list of properties worthy of preservation. Individual nominations are under review for several other churches. Two churches, **Bethel Baptist** and **Sixteenth Street Baptist Church**, have been declared “nationally significant” on the National Register and have become: National Historic Landmarks. The historic **New Pilgrim Baptist Church**, a day care center today, is expected to be listed any day. Its significance is argued at the *national* level due to the large numbers and able service of its many members and its pastors to the Movement.

The **13 additional ACMHR churches** that have been listed on the **National Register of Historic Places** as individual structures include: Canaan Baptist Church, East End Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of East Thomas, First Baptist Church of Kingston, First Ebenezer Baptist Church, Mount Ararat Baptist Church, New Rising Start Baptist Church, (Sixth Street) Peace Baptist, St. Luke AME Church, St. Luke AME Zion Church, Old Sardis Baptist Church, Shady Grove Baptist Church and West End Hills Missionary Baptist Church. Additionally, 32nd Street Baptist Church was listed as part of the Southside National Register Historic District.

Six other ACMHR churches are being nominated as part of National Register Historic Districts. St. Paul (United) Methodist Church, Sixth Avenue Zion Hill Baptist (now Deliverance Temple) Church, Metropolitan A.M. E. Zion Church and St. John A. M. E. Baptist Church are currently being nominated as part of the Birmingham Civil Rights District which has passed Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) review and is headed to Washington. First Congregation Church, being nominated as part of the Center Street (“Dynamite Hill”) National Register District, will be reviewed by AHC in the fall.

Nominations for which **additional research** has been requested by Washington reviewers include the 22nd Avenue Baptist, Bethel

AME, Christian Valley, Metropolitan Community Church, Oak Street Baptist Church, Metropolitan CME Church and St. Peter Primitive Baptist Church. Hopefully, a total of 30 churches can be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the nation's list of places worthy of preservation. That 30 of 60 churches — those that remain at their Movement era sites and retain architectural integrity and can qualify for the National Register — is remarkable considering the impact of expressways and other unfriendly urban policies of the last 40 years.

Former ACMHR secretary Lola Hendricks mentored the identification of the ACMHR churches. Many individuals assisted, including the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, the Reverend Ed Gardner, Colonel Stone Johnson, the Reverend Wilson Fallin, Lillie Fincher, and Odessa Woolfolk. Birmingham Historical Society spearheaded the research and nominations. Ellen Mertins, Trina Binkley, Christy Anderson and Malissa Bailey of the AHC staff have assisted BHS with the nominations. Dr. Glenn Eskew, Dr. C. Van West and Linda Nelson served as consultants. Researchers included Fred Renneker IV, Lauren Bishop, Michelle Crunk, Bill Jones, Brenda Howell, Carol Slaughter and Marjorie Lee White. Marjorie White serves as project director.

Program for the 50th Anniversary ACMHR Mass Meeting

Presiding Bishop Calvin Woods, Pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church & President, Birmingham Chapter, Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Selections The Carlton Reese Memorial Unity Choir, Sam Robinson Director

Prayer Reverend Thomas E. Gilmore, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Ensley

Scripture Reverend Thomas L. Wilder Jr., Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church

The Occasion Odessa Woolfolk, Founding President, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

Presentation of the Speaker Reverend Abraham Woods, Pastor, St. Joseph Baptist Church

The Speaker The Reverend Fred Lee Shuttlesworth

Documenting the Movement Churches—Presentation of 13 National

Register of Historic Places Certificates Marjorie L. White, Birmingham Historical Society

Presentation of Historical Markers Commemorating 60 ACMHR

Churches Lillie M. H. Fincher, President, Birmingham Historical Society

Benediction Willie E. Smith, Old Sardis Baptist Church

Sponsored by Birmingham Historical Society, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Birmingham-Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Committee for June 5th Victor Blackledge, Lillie Fincher, Stone Johnson, Carol Poe, Marie Sutton, Bishop Calvin Woods, Odessa Woolfolk, Marjorie White, assisted by the Cahaba Council, Ensley Area Girl Scouts under the direction of Mrs. Peggy Myles and BHS Trustees Lewis Burks Jr., Alice Bowsher, Linda Nelson, Barbara Shores, Carol Slaughter and Jim Strickland.

The sponsors and the committee express sincere appreciation to Rev. Willie E. Smith, Pastor, Old Sardis Baptist Church and members of the congregation for hosting the Mass Meeting.



One Sloss Quarters

Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Address Correction and Forwarding Requested

**Join us for the 50th Anniversary
of the Founding of the ACMHR
and Presentation of Historical Markers
to the Movement Churches**

Old Fashioned Mass Meeting

Old Sardis Baptist Church

Monday, June 5, 7:00 p.m.

*Historical markers to be picked up
in the Fellowship Hall following the service.*